

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3016

INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY PANAMA

AMEMBASSY QUITO

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMCONSUL CALI UNN

AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 0779

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, CO

SUBJECT: REGIONAL STUDY ON CONVENTIONAL ARMS SUPPLY RESTRAINTS

REF: STATE 015423

1. COLOMBIA, AT PRESENT, PROVIDES A GOOD EXAMPLE OF "DE FACTO" ARMS RESTRAINT. OF A POPULATION OF APPROXIMATELY TWENTY-FIVE MILLION ONLY SIXTY FIVE THOUSAND MEN ARE UNDER ARMS. THE ARMED FORCES RECEIVE ONLY TEN PERCENT OF THE NATIONAL BUDGET (UNDER ONE PERCENT OF GNP). ALTHOUGH THE MILITARY HERE, AS ELSEWHERE IN LATIN AMERICA, ARE A MAJOR FORCE WITH WHICH THE CIVILIAN AUTHORITIES MUST RECKON, THE COLOMBIAN ARMED FORCES HAVE A GOOD RECORD, BOTH FOR NON-INTERVENTION AND FOR ACCEPTING LESS THAN THEY WOULD LIKE IN THE WAY OF FUNDS FOR ARMS PURCHASES. ALTHOUGH FUTURE EVENTS, SUCH AS A LARGE INFLUX OF FUNDS OR A PERCEIVED THREAT TO THE NATION COULD LEAD TO HEIGHTENED ARMS OUTLAYS, SUCH A
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COURSE DOES NOT SEEM LIKELY IN THE NEAR TERM FUTURE.

THERE IS, AT PRESENT, LITTLE IMPETUS FOR AN ARMS BUILDUP;
CONVERSELY THERE IS LITTLE PERCEIVED NEED OR ENTHUSIASM
FOR ENTERING INTO BINDING AGREEMENTS ON ARMS LIMITATION.

2. THE FOLLOWING PARAGRAPHS (3-7) ARE KEYED TO SUB-
PARAGRAPHS ONE THROUGH FIVE OF PARAGRAPH 2, REFTEL.

3. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF FACTORS THAT FAVOR ARMS RESTRAINT
(ALTHOUGH, AS NOTED, VERY LITTLE THAT FAVORS TRULY
BINDING FORMAL AGREEMENTS ON ARMS CONTROL.) COLOMBIA, ONE
OF THE TWO FUNCTIONING DEMOCRACIES ON THE CONTINENT, FACES
HUGE OUTLAYS FOR NECESSARY SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE. THE
PRESENT GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO ADDRESSING THE SOCIAL
NEEDS OF THE COUNTRY. IT AND ANY FORESEEABLE ELECTED
COLOMBIAN ADMINISTRATION CAN BE EXPECTED TO DIRECT THE
LIMITED AMOUNT OF GOC FUNDS TO SOCIAL RATHER THAN MILITARY
EXPENDITURES. THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT NOT ONLY DOES

NOT OPPOSE SUCH ECONOMIC PRIORITIES BUT FAVORS THEM.
IN ADDITION COLOMBIA ENJOYS GOOD RELATIONS WITH ALL
OF HER FIVE NEIGHBORS, THREE OF WHOM ARE FELLOW MEMBERS
OF THE ANDEAN PACT. THE LONGSTANDING OFFSHORE BOUNDARY
DISPUTE WITH VENEZUELA (PARA 4) REMAINS FIRMLY IN THE
PROVINCE OF THE CIVILIAN AUTHORITIES. THE GROWING
MILITARY CAPACITY OF BRAZIL IS NOT YET SEEN AS A CAUSE
FOR COLOMBIAN MILITARY OUTLAYS. THE BRIEF WAR WITH PERU,
NEARLY HALF A CENTURY AGO, IS LARGELY FORGOTTEN HERE BOTH
BY THE PUBLIC AND BY THE MILITARY. ON BALANCE, THE
LACK OF A PERCEIVED MILITARY THREAT AND THE UNQUESTIONED
NEEDS OF THE SOCIAL SECTOR, IN COMBINATION, CONSTITUTE
AN EFFECTIVE RESTRAINT TO ARMS OUTLAYS.

4. AMONG THE OBSTACLES TO ARMS RESTRAINT, ONE MUST
INCLUDE THE AFOREMENTIONED GULF OF VENEZUELA BOUNDARY
DISPUTE. BOTH PARTIES APPEAR DETERMINED TO RESOLVE THE
MATTER AMICABLY. FONOFF OFFICIALS, HOWEVER, SAY THAT WHILE
A FAIR AGREEMENT COULD BE REACHED, THE REACTIONS TO BE
EXPECTED FROM THE PRESS AND CONGRESSES OF THE TWO NATIONS
MAKE RATIFICATION UNLIKELY. THE BOUNDARY DISPUTE WILL,
ACCORDINGLY, REMAIN WITH US AND PRESENT A PERSISTENT
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OBSTACLE TO FURTHER ARMS RESTRAINT. IN THE LONGER TERM
FUTURE, THE GROWING MILITARY CAPACITY OF BRAZIL, THE
CURRENT BRAZILIAN PROGRAM OF ROAD-BUILDING TO HER
REMOTE BORDERS, AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MILITARY
TOWN AT THOSE FRONTIERS, COULD ALARM THE COLOMBIAN
POPULACE AND MILITARY. AT PRESENT, HOWEVER, LITTLE
THOUGHT IS GIVEN TO THAT POTENTIAL THREAT. COLOMBIA'S
PERSISTENT RURAL GUERRILLA PROBLEM DOES CALL FOR

SUBSTANTIAL OUTLAYS FOR EQUIPMENT. NO NEAR TERM DIMINUTION OF THE PROBLEM APPEARS LIKELY. INDEED MORE MILITARY EQUIPMENT MAY BE NEEDED IN THE COMING YEARS. A SPUR TO COLOMBIAN ARMS OUTLAYS COULD ALSO RESULT FROM A SUDDEN GROWTH OF EXPORT EARNINGS (I.E. A MAJOR OIL FIND). THERE DOES NOT, AT PRESENT, HOWEVER, APPEAR TO BE SUBSTANTIAL LIKELIHOOD OF SUCH AN EVENT.

5. THE ANDEAN PACT ARMS LIMITATION MEETING LAST SEPTEMBER DID NOT PRESENT ANY SOLID BARRIER TO THE GROWTH OF ARMS IN THE ANDEAN REGION. IF THE ANDEAN PACT DOES SURVIVE ITS YOUTH AND BECOME THE COHESIVE ECONOMIC GROUPING THAT ITS PLANNERS ENVISAGED, IT WELL MIGHT BECOME A FACTOR IN ARMS CONTROL MATTERS. THAT EVENT, HOWEVER, IS, AT BEST, A LONG WAY INTO THE FUTURE.

6. WHILE COLOMBIANS RECOGNIZE THE U.S. NEED FOR HEAVY ARMS OUTLAYS, THEY WOULD PROBABLY RAISE EYEBROWS AT OUR URGING RESTRAINT ON SUCH A LIGHTLY ARMED NATION AS COLOMBIA. IN ADDITION, THERE WOULD BE RESENTMENT AT U.S. EFFORTS TO ORDER THE MILITARY AFFAIRS OF THIS REGION.

7. THE MOST FEASIBLE RESTRAINT ARRANGEMENTS FOR COLOMBIA WOULD BE NON-ACQUISITION (OF WEAPONS BEYOND THEIR FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL CAPACITY) AND CEILINGS (SET WELL BEYOND CURRENT LEVELS). WHILE THE IMMEDIATE EFFECT OF SUCH ARRANGEMENTS WOULD BE MINIMAL, THEY MIGHT, IN TIME, PRESENT SOME BARRIERS TO ARMS ACQUISITIONS.

8. LOOKING TO THE LONG-TERM FUTURE, A GREATLY HEIGHTENED REGIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND INTER-DEPENDENCY COULD MAKE EVIDENT THE SELF INTEREST INHERENT IN ARMS RESTRAINT. JUST AS THE SCANDINAVIANS AND THE BENELUX NATIONS NO LONGER

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ARM AGAINST THEIR REGIONAL PARTNERS, SO THE SOUTH AMERICANS MIGHT ARRIVE AT A SIMILAR SITUATION. ALTHOUGH SUCH A RATIONALE HAS LOGIC ON ITS SIDE, THE TRACK RECORD--FOUR CENTURIES OF NON-COHESION DESPITE A COMMON CULTURE, RELIGION, HISTORY AND THE NEAREST APPROACH KNOWN TO A WIDE, REGIONAL LINGUISTIC TRADITION--ARGUES AGAINST THE OPTIMISTIC VIEW.

9. THE INDUCEMENTS CITED IN PARAGRAPH FOUR OF REFTTEL DO NOT APPEAR REALISTIC IN THE COLOMBIAN CONTEXT. AN OFFER OF A U.S. SECURITY GUARANTEE WOULD APPEAR TO COLOMBIANS TO BE A SURRENDER OF SOVEREIGNTY. IN ADDITION, THE EVENTS OF 1903, WHILE NOT RESENTED, ARE NOT FORGOTTEN. A LIBERAL SUPPLY OF U.S. ARMS WOULD -AT THIS LOW LEVEL OF ARMAMENT--ONLY ADD TO LOCAL

MILITARY CAPACITY AND COULD PUT US IN THE ROLE OF SUPPLIER
FOR A REGIONAL ARMS RACE. A MORE PROMISING APPROACH
--FROM A PURELY COLOMBIAN POINT OF VIEW--WOULD BE THE
JOINING OF ARMS RESTRAINT WITH PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT
FOR COLOMBIAN GOODS IN THE U.S. MARKET. ALTHOUGH THIS
APPROACH IS FAR FROM CERTAIN OF SUCCESS, IT HAS ADVANTAGE
IN THAT MARKET ACCESS IS THE ONE MATERIAL THING THAT
COLOMBIA NOW WANTS FROM THE UNITED STATES. IF THE
U.S. CONGRESS COMES TO PUT A VALUE ON SOUTH AMERICAN ARMS
CONTROL SO SUFFICIENTLY HIGH AS TO MERIT A CHANGE
IN OUR TARIFF POLICIES, THE U.S. MIGHT WELL BE IN A
POSITION TO ENGENDER REALISTIC DISCUSSIONS OF REGIONAL
ARMS CONTROL.
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